



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

10th Sunday of Ordinary Time | Year C



Healing of the Widow of Nain's Son:
Museo regionale di messina, mario minniti, miracolo della vedova di naim



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy. (Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option 2.

THE PRAYER,
O LORD MY GOD
(By Saint Anselm.)

*O Lord my God.
Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.*

*You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.*

*Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.*

*Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Jesus reveals his identity by the miraculous deeds he performs in these several weeks of the liturgical cycle.
- ▶ Jesus is announcing the *year of favor* by his actions-- by his miraculous deeds--the healing of the centurion son's, the widow's son in today Gospel, and the forgiving of the sinful woman.
- ▶ The *year of favor* continues in our lives today through the remembering of Christ's passion, death and resurrection.
- ▶ Signs of the *year of favor* include healing of the deaf, the blind and the lame and the restoration to life of those who had fallen asleep in death.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

First Reading: 1 Kings 17: 17-24

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ God provided for the widow who showed hospitality to Elijah.
- ▶ Elijah spoke out against King Ahab and his wife Jezebel.
- ▶ Ahab allowed Jezebel to bring her pagan god Baal with her to her new home Israel. Elijah railed against her and her pagan god.
- ▶ Elijah the prophet warned Ahab that punishment for his actions would result in severe drought.
- ▶ Jezebel set out to kill Elijah and his prophets.
- ▶ Elijah sat down by a stream; God provided food for Elijah.
- ▶ God then told Elijah to go to the widow of Zarephath who lived near the Queen's father and who lived near the pagan shrine to Baal, the god of nature.
- ▶ Baal was believed to have power over the elements of rain, thunder and lightning.
- ▶ The God of Israel would demonstrate his absolute power of all other gods, especially Baal, the one believed to have dominion over the forces of nature, especially rain and the natural elements.
- ▶ Baal, however, was powerless before the God of Israel.
- ▶ Severe drought ensued. God provided for his favored ones just as God provided for Israelites in the desert.
- ▶ Elijah obeyed the Lord and in so doing put himself in harm's way. He went to the dangerous pagan land.
- ▶ God told Elijah to go to the widow and she would help him. Elijah did as God instructed him to do.
- ▶ Elijah asked the widow for a drink—no stranger was ever denied a drink of water.
- ▶ Elijah asked for more than the customary drink of water, however. Elijah asked for bread. The woman told him that she was on her way to cook her last meal

and then she and her son would die.

- ▶ Elijah believed God's word and thus persisted to ask the woman for help. God said she would help him. Elijah believed God; her poverty would not be an obstacle for God.
- ▶ Elijah told the widow that she would not die in the drought—God would provide for her and her son. The woman believed in God's word to her through Elijah.
- ▶ Hers was an act of extraordinary faith. The woman had no reason to believe this stranger in her midst, especially a stranger who was obviously an enemy to the god in which she believed.
- ▶ This vignette is a reminder of the power and efficacy of God's word. God's word will be accomplished.
- ▶ This story exalts the God of Israel over and above the Canaanite gods of nature. God's prophet spoke on behalf of God—he spoke God's own word to the woman. The widow believed in God's word and God's word was accomplished.
- ▶ God promised that her jar of flour and oil would continue to be replenished in spite of the drought.
- ▶ This was a story of hope and consolation for the people in Babylonian captivity.
- ▶ God would restore a remnant of faith-filled people.
- ▶ The woman came to faith in the God of Israel and as a result God provided for her needs.
- ▶ One cannot miss the allusion to the widow in today's Gospel. Two lowly widows are held up as icons of faith.
- ▶ God's word goes out even to the most unexpected places—pagan lands. Will God's wonders never cease?! Salvation will go out to all; it is universal; it is for the entire world.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ In what way are you able to relate this reading to your own life experience?
- ▶ Have you or anyone you know ever believed in God's word despite alarming evidence to the contrary?
- ▶ Two widows are held up today as icons of faith. How does your faith compare with their faith? What are the implications for your life?
- ▶ What does this story have to teach us today in modern society?
- ▶ How is it possible that this poor woman could display such hope and faith in a God she did not even worship in the face of utter destitution? What does she have to teach us today in that regard?

Second Reading: Galatians 1:11-19

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ Paul struggled to pass on the Christian way of life as he discerned what belonged to their former religious Jewish heritage and what belongs to authentic Christianity.
- ▶ There was constant tension over what to do about Gentiles. Should they be required to follow the Law of Moses and be circumcised?
- ▶ Paul insisted that faith—not the Law—was necessary for salvation.
- ▶ Some Jewish Christians challenged what they believed was Paul's liberal, watered-down approach to religion.
- ▶ Paul was antagonistic toward those he called Judaizers. They were his proverbial thorn in the flesh!
- ▶ Paul believed their hostility was antithetical to the Gospel.
- ▶ Paul defended his authority to teach as coming from God; it was of divine origin—since it was Christ who revealed himself to Paul at Damascus.
- ▶ Paul believed that his Law-driven practice of Judaism did little to prepare him for an encounter with the risen Christ.
- ▶ He was held captive by the Law.
- ▶ Paul believed that he received a mandate from Christ himself to teach that we are free from the Law—we are to worship God in freedom and in truth.
- ▶ The Law does not save; Christ saves.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ In what way, if any, can you relate to the teaching in this reading?
- ▶ Do you know anyone who has an overly scrupulous approach to the Law today? What is wrong with that approach? What might Paul say to such a person? What would be his instruction?
- ▶ Why can the Law be dangerous for our spiritual lives?
- ▶ If we are free from the Law does that mean we can do whatever we want? What would Paul have to say about that?
- ▶ What is your approach to following the Law of God?

Gospel: Luke 7: 11-17

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Luke is the only evangelist that relates the story of the raising of the widow of Naim's son.
- ▶ We are to consider this story within the context of Luke's intention in the Gospel.
- ▶ Luke's catechism is two-fold. He sets out to show that Christ has deep love and compassion for the poor and the lowly and that he is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- ▶ The poor widow is not only poor, but the death of her son, her primary caretaker and provider makes her condition all the worse.
- ▶ Whenever Scripture speaks of an unnamed person, that person represents a collectivity. She is a representative figure—she represents the poor, broken, disadvantaged and marginalized.
- ▶ We are to take note that she is called a widow. Immediately we are drawn to the social agenda of the prophets in which care for widows is tantamount to right relationship with God.
- ▶ Luke echoes back to the lament of the widow in today's first reading and compares Jesus to Elijah reminding us that God has great love and concern for those who cannot take care of themselves and that Jesus is not only a great prophet like the prophets of old, but he is also the Ultimate PROPHET of God.
- ▶ This story is a reminder to the people that Jesus is a great prophet who was manifesting God to the people. Jesus is the long awaited Messiah of the people. The messianic reign was upon them!
- ▶ Elijah was considered a prophet who would return at the end of days. He performed a ritual action and prayed that God would answer his prayer and respond by raising the widow's son. Jesus, on the other hand, merely spoke the *word* and the widow's son was raised to life; a miracle occurred. He did not need to invoke God as Elijah did. He was and is God.
- ▶ Elijah's role was to announce the Messianic reign.
- ▶ Jesus is the fulfillment of that reign.
- ▶ The reign of God was announced in both word and deed: Jesus was fulfilling messianic prophecy by preaching God's love to the poor, healing the sick, freeing the oppressed and welcoming the outcast and marginalized.
- ▶ Luke refers to Jesus as "Lord" for the first time. More than mere prophet, Jesus is the Divine Lord of the universe.
- ▶ Jesus praised the faith of the centurion when he requested healing for his child.
- ▶ There is no faith requirement in this miracle. Jesus acts out of love and

compassion alone.

- ▶ Many refer to Luke's Gospel as the Gospel of women since so many women were beneficiaries of his healing power.
- ▶ Women were nearly on a par with children and slaves in social standing. They were powerless and voiceless. Jesus stood with all the powerless and with all those who had no advocate to speak for them.
- ▶ Even though Luke's perspective was often geared toward the Gentiles, this event is particularly Jewish in context.
- ▶ Gentiles were called to faith and to live in and establish the reign of Christ.
- ▶ The Jewish understanding of the Messianic reign was to usher in the final age. Thus, today's proclamation of the last days/messianic reign, evident in the raising of the centurion's child and the widow's son, speaks to a core belief of the Israelites—the resurrection of the dead.
- ▶ Luke associates death with being lost and life as being found.
- ▶ Thus, the lost, dead son—just like the lost, dead Israel would be found in the new resurrected life ushered in by the advent of the Messiah.
- ▶ By Jesus' *word* alone, Israel would become the new Israel and beneficiaries of the resurrection Jesus promised.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does the widow in today's Gospel teach us about our relationship with God?
- ▶ What is Jesus teaching us in this Gospel? What are the implications for your Christian discipleship?
- ▶ What does it mean to us today that Jesus' miracles ushered in the messianic reign of God? In what way do you still need a Messiah in your life?
- ▶ "Luke associates death with being lost and life as being found." What are some areas of your life in which you were/are lost and areas in which you were/are found? What in your life gives you life? What in your life presents you with the opposite of life—what in your life is anything BUT life-giving? What is the remedy for that according to today's Gospel?
- ▶ Jesus shows us his absolute unconditional love for the poor. Do we as Christians

today show the same love? What evidence is there in the Christian community that would affirm us in our love for the poor? Where do we fall short? What are you called to do about it when we fall short?

- ▶ How do we treat widows and orphans in our culture? If the way we treat them is an indication of our relationship with God, how would you describe our relationship with God?
- ▶ Who today gets rich off of the backs of the poor? In what way does this continue in modern society?
- ▶ Why is such behavior often excused by many people? Why does the Biblical mandate to care for orphans and widows often fall on deaf ears?
- ▶ What does the behavior of the widow teach us? In what way have you ever behaved like the widow in today's Gospel?
- ▶ Why did Jesus' teaching and his response to people like the poor widow lead to his death? In what way does this still take place today? What is the lesson for us?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

The Prayer of Oscar Romero

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation
in realizing that. This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well. It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference
between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.
Amen.

OR Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- ▶ Who today gets rich off of the backs of the poor? In what way does this continue in modern society?
- ▶ Why is such behavior often excused by many people? Why does the Biblical mandate to care for orphans and widows often fall on deaf ears?

“Today’s gospel reminds me of the ways in which the poor are exploited in the world and in the church. We often embrace an attitude which insists that if the poor would just work harder, they would not be in such dire straits. While there is no doubt some truth to any statement, it is false to assume that the poor are poor because they refuse to work. The system keeps them poor. Years ago our family was working with the poor in an urban parish. We were driving from a suburb to an inner city parish. We decided that we should discern about moving into a poor inner-city neighborhood in the parish. Our investigation began in earnest. Our good intentions were thwarted at every turn. We looked at many rat-infested dilapidated houses in the inner city. In the end we decided against the move. We could not afford to move. We were paying far less rent for a nice house in the suburbs than what we would have to pay in the inner city neighborhood. We could not afford to move into the city, nor would it have been good stewardship of the resources we were given. The reason the rent was so high was because it was offered on a weekly basis--an attractive option for the poor who are often paid by the week. The very people who need a break are exploited at every turn of the road.

Parishes are also guilty of exploitation. Some parishes publish the giving history of their parishioners in hopes of shaming people into better stewardship. The dollar a week of Mrs. So and So may represent the greatest sacrifice in the entire parish. One parish took people off the parish roster if after one year they failed to donate anything to the parish. They were no longer considered members of that community. No questions were asked, they were simply expunged. That same parish donates nothing to the world’s poor.

Our parish is very generous to the poor. I am honored to be in a parish that tithes, and that supports multiple projects for the poor in this country and in the Third World. Do we always exercise an option for the poor, however? Probably not. Our first question is not, “How does this decision impact the poor in our parish, community and world?” We have a long way to go before we get to that point in our justice consciousness. I am confident that we are on the way, however.”

That excerpt was written twelve years ago. I could write the same thing today as it is as true now as it was then. I am in a new parish and it is even more conscious of its responsibility to the world’s poor. Our parish gives a half million dollars a year to the world’s poor. Hospitals and schools have been built in Third World countries. I am awed by the generosity of the people.

Yet still we hear echoes at times of the undeserving poor who scam the system, refuse to work and are blight on society.

I once worked with a gentleman whose life's work was with the poor. He told me something I will never forget. He said, "When we meet a cantankerous wealthy person we forgive it by saying that person is simply eccentric. If we encounter a cantankerous poor person they are ungrateful, undeserving, scoundrels. People are sinners whether rich or poor. Sometimes the condition of poverty itself so ruptures human dignity that there is little pleasantries left to offer others. Jesus had tremendous compassion on the absolute poverty stricken people in his midst. To water that down into categories of the deserving and undeserving poor is contrary to the Gospel. Yes he challenged personal responsibility but he always loved them into that responsibility.

Portions of my reflection from Word and Worship Workbook, Year B, (Paulist Press, 2000, 717). This reflection is repeated from Faith, Life and Creed: Cycle B, Thirty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time as the themes are very similar.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Jesus Christ
Incarnation
Miracles
Catholic Social Teaching

Heaven, Hell and Purgatory
Life Issues
Liturgical Year
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus is announcing the advent of his reign by the miracles he is performing. Today he raises the widow of Nain's son. Jesus is the new eschatological Son of David, the Son of God who has come to save the world and affirm his mastery over life and death—life in which we are found, and death in which we are lost. The healing stories echo the reason for his Incarnation—his saving life, death and resurrection. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on JESUS CHRIST.

INCARNATION

Jesus is announcing the advent of his reign by the miracles he is performing. Today he raises the widow of Nain's son. Jesus is the new eschatological Son of David, the Son of God who has come to save the world and affirm his mastery over life and death—life in which we are found, and death in which we are lost. The healing stories echo the reason for his Incarnation—his saving life, death and resurrection. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on the INCARNATION of his Son.

MIRACLES

Jesus is announcing the advent of his reign by the miracles he is performing. Today he raises the widow of Nain's son. Jesus is the new eschatological Son of David, the Son of God who has come to save the world and affirm his mastery over life and death—life in which we are found, and death in which we are lost. The healing stories echo the reason for his coming. Miracles are a sign that the Messianic reign is upon us. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on the MIRACLES Jesus performed.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus heralds the widow in today's Gospel who represents the common person—the peasant community that was considered less than by the elite class. Jesus always stretched those boundaries and invited people to see the equality of all people. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

LIFE ISSUES

Jesus heralds the widow in today's Gospel who represents the common person—the peasant community that was considered less than by the elite class. Jesus always stretched those boundaries and invited people to see the equality of all people. Jesus upheld the dignity of each person—he upheld every person's right to life to the fullest. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about LIFE ISSUES.

ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

Miracles were believed to usher in the last days and the end times. Jesus is announcing those last days by the miracle he performed. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.